Future of Buriton Chalk Pits secure thanks to Heritage Lottery Fund grant

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The money will be put towards conserving the ecologically valuable chalk pits in Buriton, a well-loved Local Nature Reserve and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation.

It will pay for a programme of maintenance work including scrub clearance and the creation of new habitats. New paths will be created and existing ones improved, local school children will be shown the natural and industrial history of the pits and a part-time ranger will be employed by Queen Elizabeth Country Park to help manage the site.

The chalk pits were part of a lime-works quarry during the late 19th and early 20th century but are now an important nature reserve and home to several rare species.

The Chalk Pits Project was started by Buriton Parish Council three years ago when the future ownership of the site was in question. After close work with East Hampshire District Council, Queen Elizabeth Country Park and the South Downs Joint Committee a successful bid for a Heritage lottery Fund grant was drawn up.

Andrew Bray, Chair of Buriton Parish Council, said: "Buriton Parish Council is very pleased to have been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in support of the Chalk Pits Project. We have been actively seeking ways to protect this important nature reserve with its associated local industrial heritage for the benefit of both our parishioners and visitors to the area. It will help us to secure a sustainable future for the site and enable us to enhance the features that make the site special."

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the South East England region, said: "We are delighted that this money will now save and conserve this wonderful nature reserve. This announcement comes as 2010 has been declared International Year of Biodiversity by the UN, asking people to celebrate and safeguard the enormous variety of wildlife and plantlife our world has to offer. Now, the delicate ecology of this site can be enjoyed by people of all ages for years to come."

The pits have a deep significance for the area as at one time nearly a quarter of the parish population relied on the lime workings. They were started in the 1860s and flourished until the 1930s when cement replaced lime as the building industry’s preferred material.

During World War II the lime pits were used by the Royal Navy and given the name HMS Mirtle. They became a centre for the removal of explosives from unexploded ordinance with devices brought to the quarry bowl and made safe.

After the war the site was abandoned. During the following sixty years the site gradually reverted to its wild state and is now classified as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and a Local Nature Reserve. There are several rare species now resident.

During 2007 and 2008 work began on securing the future of the site. Residents of Buriton and the wider area were consulted and a management plan drawn up citing among its prime objectives the retention of the pits’ as a place for visitors to enjoy, the preservation the local wildlife and the promotion of its interesting history.

The project will be officially launched in the near future and it is hoped that themed walks will be organised and events held during the year.

Notes to editors

The HLF grant to the project Buriton Chalk Pits is for £149,400 (81% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

2010 has been declared as International Year of Biodiversity by the United Nations - the year that celebrates the diversity of life on earth, including every plant, animal and micro-organism. HLF is supporting the International Year of Biodiversity. The diversity of life on earth is crucial for human well-being and now is the time to act to preserve it. www.biodiversityislife.net

Further information

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